

H and Future Farmers of America in school, and continues to support these organizations. Geneva served as president of the Tulare Kings Chapter of California Women for Agriculture, and also on the State Board. She is active in the Farm Bureau, and represents agriculture in the classroom.

Mildred "Micki" Parker, of LeGrand, CA, taught at both Chowchilla and Merced High Schools. She was a sponsor of the American Field Service and advisor to Future Business Leaders of America. She and her husband Richard farmed almonds for many years. After her retirement from teaching, she actively participated in day-to-day farm operations. Micki has been active in the Merced area with the County Area Agency of Aging, Community Action Board, Women's Club and Farm Bureau. She is also a member of the Merced Chapter of California Women for Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Common Threads Award winners. These women have shown outstanding involvement, not only in agriculture, but in strengthening their respective communities. I urge my colleagues to join me in wishing these honorees a bright future and continued success.

CELEBRATING OUR AMERICAN HEROES

HON. STEVEN T. KUYKENDALL

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 9, 1999

Mr. KUYKENDALL. Mr. Speaker, like many of my colleagues, I spent the recent district work period participating in celebratory events for African American History Month. I saluted the heroism of Eric Davis on the baseball diamond and in his fight against colon cancer, John Bryant of Operation Hope—our first non-profit investment banking organization, and Vernon J. Baker, a Purple Heart, Medal of Honor, and Bronze Star recipient for acts of valor in World War II.

Let me tell you a little about Vernon. Second Lieutenant Baker served in the Army and fought in World War II. On April 5–6, 1945, Second Lieutenant Baker destroyed enemy installations, personnel and equipment during his company's attack against a strongly entrenched enemy in mountainous terrain. When his company was stopped by the concentrated fire from several machine-gun emplacements, he crawled to one position and destroyed it, killing three German soldiers. Continuing forward, he attacked an enemy observation post and killed its two occupants. With the aid of one of his men, Second Lieutenant Baker attacked two more machine-gun nests, killing or wounding the four enemy soldiers occupying these positions. He then covered the evacuation of the wounded personnel of his company by occupying an exposed position and drawing enemy fire. On the following night, Second Lieutenant Baker voluntarily led a battalion advance through enemy mine fields and heavy fire toward the division objective.

Like Vernon, African Americans have played an integral role in defending American ideals since this country's origin. Their willingness to serve this country dates back to the Revolutionary War and their service as "privateers" in America's first merchant marine. They fought in the Battle of Concord, crossed the

Delaware River, and served in the Continental Army. Thousands served in the War of 1812, protected New Orleans when threatened in 1815, and fought with the Party of Lincoln to achieve emancipation. Almost 400,000 African Americans fought alongside white infantrymen in World War I, though they had to do so in segregated units and in the face of widespread misinformation that African Americans lacked the intellectual ability to serve their country. Today, almost 25% of our armed forces are African American.

We seldom hear of the acts of individual courage displayed by our African American vets. Yet, the simple act of signing up to serve—and facing bigotry, discrimination, and segregation head on—is at least as heroic as the act of serving this country. Even today, though, our history books lack real substance about the full contributions of soldiers like Vernon Baker to our military legacy. Recognizing their contribution, even if it takes African American History Month to prompt us, is the first step we must take.

Ultimately, the contribution of men like Vernon Baker should be remembered not as the contribution of an African American, but as the contribution of an American soldier. To quote Interior Secretary Harold Ickes, "Not color, not race, not religion, not pedigree of family, nor place of birth, not social standing, not size of his bank account, not his trade, nor her profession" makes one an American. "An American is one who loves justice and has a deep and abiding respect for the dignity of men and women. An American will fight for his freedom and that of his neighbor. An American will forgo ease and property and security in order to preserve for himself and for his children the rights of free men and women."

I proudly salute Vernon Baker, as well as Eric Davis and John Bryant, for their fight to preserve for all the rights of free men and women. I salute each, not because he or she is an African American, but because they are Americans, fighting for collective ideals and to make the world safe for all of us.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. LEE TERRY

OF NEBRASKA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 9, 1999

Mr. TERRY. Mr. Speaker, I was unavoidably detained during rollcall vote 31. Had I been present, I would have voted "nay."

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE NADLER SOCIAL SECURITY BILL

HON. JERROLD NADLER

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 9, 1999

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Speaker, I am here today because, as the ongoing national dialogue at tests, the Social Security system is at a crossroads. The decisions we make this Congress will have aftershocks that will be felt well into the second half of the 21st century. Concern for our children and our children's children demand that those decisions be made carefully, seriously, and compassionately—keeping in mind Social Security's historic commitments.

Today, I am announcing the introduction of a comprehensive Social Security plan that will preserve the system while staying consistent with certain key values that have always provided the heart and soul of the nation's most popular social program: this plan does not raise the retirement age, it does not cut benefits, it does not raise tax rates, and it does not shift the risk onto individuals through individual private accounts funded by FICA taxes.

These are not academic considerations. They are the guiding principles of a program that has risen literally millions of human beings out of the wrenching grip of poverty—poverty that for so long was too often synonymous with old age or disability. For over half a century, they have been part of what defines Americans as a people.

President Clinton has already put forth an excellent framework to strengthen Social Security and Medicare and increase private savings, which keeps the system solvent until 2055. My plan builds on this firm foundation, but takes an extra step to completely eliminate the projected 2.19% actuarial deficit. According to the Social Security Actuaries, my plan brings the Social Security System into long-term actuarial balance for the foreseeable future—at least 75 years.

Briefly, here's how we do it. My plan implements the President's proposal to authorize the transfer of 62% of the projected budget surplus to the Social Security Trust Fund for a period of 15 years. It creates an Independent Social Security Investment Oversight Board that is authorized to hire private managers to invest a higher, though still prudent, portion of the Social Security surplus into index funds. And it increases—and then indexes—the cap on taxable wages, without removing the cap altogether. Currently, 93% of wage earners earn less than the cap, and will be totally unaffected. Under current law, less than 85% of all wages is subject to FICA contributions; this has slipped in recent years from the historic 90% due to the dramatic rise in disparity of wages. Raising the cap will restore the historic level, while affecting only the richest 7% of the population.

These steps will ensure the solvency of Social Security for at least 75 years, while ensuring the guaranteed benefits Social Security provides to seniors, individuals with disabilities, widows, widowers, and children. And—I can not say this often enough—it does so without raising the retirement age, without cutting benefits, without raising tax rates, and without shifting the risk onto the backs of individuals. This is meaningful, responsible legislation, and I intend to do my best to make sure my colleagues give it the hearing it deserves.

H.R. 475, MILITARY SPOUSES

HON. PATSY T. MINK

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 9, 1999

Mrs. MINK of Hawaii. Mr. Speaker, recently I introduced H.R. 475, extending eligibility to use the military health care system and commissary stores to un-remarried former spouses of a member of the uniformed services in certain circumstances.

Current law provides health and commissary benefits to un-remarried former spouses who